

null  
Lucia A Keegan 07/31/2006 10:29:53 AM From DB/Inbox: Lucia A Keegan

Cable  
Text:

UNCLAS SENSITIVE PARIS 05084

SIPDIS  
cxparis:  
ACTION: UNESCO  
INFO: POL ECON AMBU AMB AMBO DCM SCI

DISSEMINATION: UNESCOX  
CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: AMB:LVLIVER  
DRAFTED: POL:DOSTROFF  
CLEARED: ED:SLOVEJOY

VZCZCFRI671  
RR RUEHC RUEHTV RUEHCO  
DE RUEHFR #5084/01 2081052  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 271052Z JUL 06  
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9839  
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 0536  
RUEHCO/AMEMBASSY COTONOU 0841

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 005084

SIPDIS

FROM USMISSION UNESCO PARIS

SENSITIVE

STATE PASS TO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION FOR ROBIN GILCHRIST AND  
STEPHANIE WHELPLEY

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [UNESCO](#) [SCUL](#)  
SUBJECT: EDUCATION REFORM ATMOSPHERICS AND GATHERING STORM CLOUDS AT  
UNESCO

REFTEL: PARIS 04674

¶1. (SBU) Summary: UNESCO's ADG for Education Peter Smith's information briefing on reform in the Education Sector provided an insight into the first signs of a deteriorating climate of consensus and goodwill at UNESCO. The repercussions of the current political situation in the Middle East are starting to be felt here, and may open some rifts prior to September's Executive Board meeting. End summary.

¶2. (U) Attempting to make up for missteps in process, Peter Smith, UNESCO's Assistant Director General for Education, held a general information meeting on his plans for reform of UNESCO's Education Sector yesterday, 25 July, at UNESCO headquarters, attended by Ambassador Oliver.

¶3. (SBU) Smith began the meeting by requesting delegates to stand and observe a minute of silence for all those suffering in the "stress and violence" of the Lebanese-Israeli crisis, adding a slight political edge to the gathering. The Israeli delegate, sitting very much by himself throughout the meeting, later said that things are getting "uncomfortably hot" at UNESCO in terms of his contacts at the international organization since the start of the conflict.

¶4. (U) Later in the meeting, the Lebanese delegate used the opportunity to talk about the current crisis in his country, saying the "doors of hell have opened", and asked Smith what specific relief plans UNESCO had prepared for Lebanon. Smith replied that UNICEF and other United Nations organizations were principally responsible for relief efforts in such situations. However, he said

that as far as UNESCO's Education sector is concerned, plans would be readied to help assist in getting the education system up and running as soon as a secure environment was restored to the country. Smith invited the Lebanese delegate to meet with him privately to discuss further his concerns after the meeting.

¶15. (U) Smith spent several minutes explaining the lack of French documentation, complaining that he had been forced to hire outside contractors to translate documents due to a shortage of translation personnel, and that the French versions would be coming soon. While not on its face an important problem, there are several Francophone delegations that find the American-accented voice of the Education sector to be an irritant.

¶16. (U) Smith spoke to a full room, despite the late hour, with over a dozen ambassadors present, including India, Japan, the Netherlands, Benin, Niger and the Congo. Smith had previously held an information meeting for representatives from the UNESCO Executive Board Group I membership on July 6th(see reftel). Smith had planned to hold similar meetings for delegates from the other electoral groups earlier in the month, but said that he was unable to organize meetings due to various scheduling conflicts. He said he has regional group consultations planned for September.

¶17. (U) What is increasingly clear is that this lack of prior consultation on Smith's part, has given several member states, in particular the African member states, what they see as a legitimate complaint about Smith's handling of the reform process.

¶18. (U) The Ambassador from Benin, Olabiyi Babalola Joseph YAI, who is Chairman of the Financial and Administrative Commission of the Executive Board and President of the Circle of Permanent Delegates, promised Smith that several issues would be raised before the F&A Commission this fall during the 175th Executive Board.

¶19. (U) In particular, Ambassador Yai focused on Smith's lack of consultations with the African Group, suggesting that "informing" them through this information meeting, after decisions were taken and the Director General had already given Smith the green light to implement his program of reforms, was insufficient.

¶110. (SBU) Algeria also questioned the lack of consultations. Smith, attempted to reply by talking about his extensive consultations with Education Sector personnel, at headquarters and in the field offices. He also said that for reasons of confidentiality, he had kept his internal consultations on close-hold with the Director General and, at one point responded by saying, at UNESCO, we often "talk things to death."

¶111. (SBU) Yai also questioned Smith about the choice of the consulting firm, Navigant, asking what expertise they, a Chicago-based consulting firm, could have regarding the problems of education in Africa. Smith replied that the choice of Navigant, centered on its experience in management consulting, and that the international education experts are UNESCO's staff. Yai, seemingly unconvinced, also said that he would question Smith about the costs involved in the reform process, including the contract with Navigant. Smith replied saying that costs were "neutral", but Yai made it clear that the subject was far from closed.

¶112. (SBU) Yai's intervention was not unexpected, as we had previously reported (see reftel), that the Benin Ambassador had questioned whether Smith had received the necessary mandate from the Executive Board before launching into this reform program.

¶113. (SBU) India's Ambassador Mukherjee then asked Peter what he meant by "unitary budgeting" in terms of extra budgetary and core education sector funding. He said that he will continue to keep the two separate, but will try to anticipate future extra budgetary support on the basis of past extra budgetary support so that he can factor in those funds when preparing budgets for the sector. On the subject of South/South coordination, we also heard from the Indian DCM that India will insist that Smith agree to have a point person at headquarters dedicated to this issue, or they will raise it before the Executive Board.

¶114. (U) Finland's Representative, who announced herself as speaking for the EU, stated that the EU was supportive of the reform process. However, she asked whether the overall process could be more

transparent, and wondered if member states could be briefed from the perspective of the individuals who may be affected by the reform. Smith said that all reorganizations are painful processes, and that he is attempting to make the reform as humane as possible.

¶15. (U) While Smith may be telling the truth from his perspective, UNESCO's staff unions have recently called on the Director General to freeze implementation of the reforms until the cases of several employees are reviewed and resolved to their satisfaction.

¶16. (SBU) In another meeting yesterday, but on the same subject, Georges Haddad, one of Smith's key directors, complained that the restructuring of the Education Sector has obliged him to take on several employees that he has no place for in his section.

¶17. (SBU) Following the meeting, the Ambassador of the Netherlands told Ambassador Oliver that the Ambassador from India complained that Smith did not give an adequate response to her question about South/South cooperation. She also commented on the fact that Smith was alone on the stage and seemed to have only the support of the DG in pursuing his reform.

OLIVER